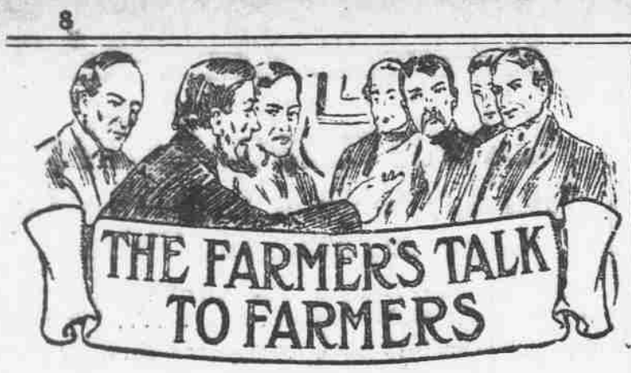

RECOGNIZES THE POSITION OF THE FARMERS.

(Written Specially For The Bulletin.)

President Harding devotes more attention to farming and railroads than to any other subjects, in his last message to congress. This ought to be enough to show you and me that we haven't been far off our trolley in talking as much as we have about those two things, lately.

To begin with, the president officially and formally confirms as true the assertion of farmers that they were hit first and worst in the deflation which followed the war. "The first distress of re-adjustment came to the farmer," he says. He calls attention to the fact that, by certain measures ostensibly for farm relief, "this congress already has taken cognizance of the misfortune which precipitate deflation brought to American agriculture."

The transportation problem, one "demanding the most rigorous consideration of congress and the country," has to do with more than agriculture, of course. "It is the channel for the flow of the country's commerce. But"—Let's make a fresh paragraph for this next quotation:

"But the farmer is particularly hard hit. His market, so affected by world consumption, does not admit of price adjustment to meet carrying charges. In the last half of the year now closing the railways, broken in carrying capacity because of rolling power and motive stock out of order, though insistently declaring to the contrary, embargoed his shipments or denied him cars when fortunate markets were calling. Too frequently transportation failed while perishable products were turning from possible profits to losses counted in tens of millions."

Have you and I said anything more sweeping or more emphatic than that, in the course of our different talks about the way in which deflation and railroad rumpuses have swatted the farmers of the country? If some of my non-farming readers have thought I was, perhaps, a little biased by sympathy for my fellow-farmers, if they have pooh-poohed my complaints on the theory that "the farmers are always finding fault about something," I hope they'll ask themselves how it happens that President Harding, himself a non-farmer, out-spokenly corroborates us and adds his voice to our complaints?

Let me ask you to read another quotation:

"Had we escaped the coal and railway strikes, which had no excuse for their beginning and less justification for their delayed settlement, we should have done infinitely better. . . . In the folly of conflict our progress was hindered, and the heavy cost has not yet been fully estimated. . . . The railway strike accentuated the difficulty of the American farmer. The first distress of readjustment came to the farmer and it will not be a re-adjustment fit to abide until he is relieved. . . . Agricultural misfortune is a national misfortune. . . . Agriculture is a vital activity in our national life. In it we had our beginning, and its westward march with the star of empire has reflected the growth of the republic. It has its vicissitudes which no legislation will prevent, its hardships for which no law can provide escape. But the congress can make available to the farmer the financial facilities which have been built up under government aid and supervision for other commercial and industrial enterprises." This, President Harding declares, not only "may be done," but "MUST BE DONE."

All this, as you'll readily understand has to do with giving farmers increased credit facilities; enabling them to borrow more money at need, and on easier terms. Anyone can easily see that the same rules which govern a bank's lendings to merchants or manufacturers whose goods "turn over" every sixty or ninety days, won't fit the conditions of either crop or livestock farming, where from six months to three years are necessary for a similar "turn over." So far as changes in the banking laws may provide for this difference in conditions, a betterment of the farmer's borrowing status may work for good in many cases. This, however, is matter for discussion and for allowable difference of opinion. It certainly doesn't cover the whole ground. President Harding frankly admits as much. He goes on:

"But American agriculture needs more than added credit facilities. The credits will help to solve the pressing problems growing out of war-inflated land values and the drastic deflation of three years ago, but permanent and deserved agricultural good fortune depends on better and cheaper transportation."

Which brings us back to the question of railroads and railroad strikes, again. Enough of that for the present. But here's one more final extract from the message, which I feel constrained to make because it so magnificently sustains one thesis you and I have been maintaining for many years:—

"The wide spread between production costs and prices which consumers pay concerns every citizen of the republic. It contributes very largely to the unrest in agriculture, and must stand sponsor for much against which we inveigh in that familiar term—the high cost of living. No one doubts the excess is traceable to the levy of the middleman, but it would be unfair to charge him with all the responsibility before we appraise what is exacted of him by our modernly complex life. . . . Admittedly, the consumer is much to blame himself, because of his prodigal expenditure and his exaction of service," etc.

For this the president's suggestion is right in line with that which we have talked over, again and again, viz: the importance of co-operative buying as well as co-operative marketing.

Now, I don't want to be understood as saying that these fragments which I have quoted are all there is in the message of interest. Far from it. The message is a rather unusually good one from start to finish. It has a firmness of touch which suggests that President Harding is "getting on to" his job. Curiously enough, all the way through it shows that he, the executive, is really closer to the people, more responsive to their call, and more devoted to their welfare than the four or five hundred congressmen at the other end of the avenue. It may not be respectful but it is true to say that the country would be better off if that undigested and undigesting mob under the big dome would simply carry out the suggestions of the message and then—go home.

Of course, they won't. They've got to wrangle and splutter and clapper-claw each other, and kick up such a dust as to obscure the real issues. As President Thomas Jefferson said, more than a hundred years ago, they'll question everything, yield nothing, and talk by the hour."—"By the hour?" Yea, verily, by the day and the week and the year—to the uttermost verge of eternity, if the limitations of law didn't shut them up, automatically, on the fourth of next March! What a blessing it would be if we could once more have a congress made up of such men as Washington and Franklin who, as Jefferson has testified, never spoke more than ten minutes at a time, and then only to the main point in debate. But Senator Podsnap and Congressman Hicklebury class themselves higher than Washington and Franklin; consider themselves more intelligent and want us to regard them as more patriotic. Which, no doubt, contributes greatly to their own self-satisfaction—so long as they can get away with it.

It is reported by Washington correspondents that several members of the farm bloc, so-called, are not satisfied with the message. Naturally. There are several members of that bloc who are constitutionally unfitted for finding satisfaction in anything outside of their own contrariety. There are others who are so blinded by personal prejudice as to be unable to see clearly or act reasonably. There are also probably some demagogues in it. There are in every other political organization, and it isn't likely this is a miraculous exception.

But I think the sober, sensible, foreseeing people on the farms will recognize a flavor of statesmanship in it.

By the way, I noticed, the other day, that The Man Who Talks for The Bulletin couldn't quite make up his mind, from a search of the dictionaries, what was the difference betwen a "statesman" and a "politician." I'm reluctant to be thought of as setting up against the dictionary. But I can't resist the temptation to offer one definition as a tentative step toward accuracy. A "statesman," as I see him, is a man who lives and works for the welfare of the state; a "politician" is a man who seeks first the advantage of his party.

If that distinction fairly describes a real difference, I can't help but feel that President Harding's latest message puts him on a plane of true statesmanship. I haven't much hope that congress will rise to it. That needn't make us common folk the less appreciative of the president's plain speaking, and of his manifest desire to steer the legislative body into constructive performance.

It isn't talk that's wanted, now, but action. The president remarks, elsewhere in his message, "It is no figure of speech to say that we have come to the test of our civilization." He refers mainly in this pregnant sentence to the imminent bankruptcy of our agriculture and the equally threatening smash-up impending in our transportation. Here are two menaces which must be met, at once, by firm, wise, effective action.

Can congress keep its mouth shut long enough to use its brains We shall see. The president, anyway, has done his part.

THE FARMER.

Liberal crops of citrus fruits and heavy apple harvests in some parts of the United States give promise of an abundant supply of these fruits during the coming holiday season.